

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC 6916

INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

AMCONSUL JERUSALEM

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PFOR US EG IS

SUBJ: REACTION TO GOI DECISION TO

REDUCE FORCES NEAR SUEZ CANAL

1. SUMMARY: JUNE 2 ANNOUNCEMENT THAT ISRAEL WILL REDUCE
MILITARY FORCES DEPLOYED NEAR SUEZ CANAL RECEIVED NEAR UNANIMOUS
PRESS AND POLITICAL SUPPORT. MAIN DISSENTING NOTE VOICED
BY LIKUD WHICH STATED " GESTURE IS UNJUSTIFIED". PRESS
GENERALLY STRESSED LACK OF MILITARY SIGNIFICANCE
IN MOVE. KNESSET TO DEBATE ACTION JUNE 4.

2. PRIMIN RABIN'S ANNOUNCEMENT ON REDUCTION OF
FORCES NEAR SUEZ CANAL DOMINATES PRESS JUNE 3.
DETAILS OF DECISION AS WELL AS REACTIONS BY
MILITARY AND POLITICAL COMMENTATORS AND EDITORIALS
CARRIED IN ALL PAPERS.

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3. RABIN'S ANNOUNCEMENT WAS WELCOMED BY MAJOR

POLITICAL PARTIES, WITH NOTABLE EXCEPTION OF THE LIKUD KNESSET FACTION ADOPTED BY LARGE MAJORITY. ENACHAN BEGIN'S PROPOSAL THAT LIKUD SHOULD OPPOSE GESTURE ON THE GROUNDS THAT " THERE IS NO JUSTIFICATION FOR THE ISRAELI GESTURE...BECAUSE OF EGYPT'S DECLARED REFUSAL TO ALLOW THE PASSAGE OF ISRAELI SHIPS THROUGH THE SUEZ CANAL." LIBERAL, FREE CENTER AND STATE LIST LIKUD MEMBERSWERE LESS CRITICAL OF GOI'S DECISION. IN ADDITION TO FAVORABLE COMMENTS FROM LABOR PARTY KNESSET MEMBERS, SPOKESMEN FOR MAPAM, NATIONAL RELIGIOUS PARTY, INDEPENDENT LIBERAL PARTY AND MOKED SUPPORTED DECISION, PARTICULARLY FOR POLITICAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL REASONS. KNESSET WILL DEBATE GOI DECISION JUNE 4.

4. HAARETZ CALLED THE LIKUD ASSAULT AGAINST THE GESTURE UNJUSTIFIED, "NO ONE CAN CLAIM THAT THIS REDUCTION...WILL PREJUDICE OUR SECURITY...BUT THERE ARE GROUNDS FOR ASSUMING THAT ANY STEP WHICH IS LIKELY TO PROMOTE NORMALIZATION PROCESS IN THE CANAL ZONE WILL HAVE POSITIVE EFFECT ON ANY DIPLOMATIC CAMPAIGN THAT LIES AHEAD OF US..." EDITORIAL EXPRESSES REGRET THAT DECISION HAD NOT BEEN MADE EARLIER AND CONCLUDES THAT " DECISION DEMONSTRATES THAT ISRAEL IS OUT TO CREATE NORMAL CONDITIONS IN THE AREA WHICH THE WHOLE WORLD WANTS QUIET..."

5. DAVAR EDITORIAL CALLS DECISION "SENSIBLE POLITICAL STEP DESIGNED TO SHOW THE WORLD THAT ISRAEL STRIVES TO REDUCE PRESSURE..." EDITORIAL REGARDS DECISION AS TACTICALLY IMPORTANT AS A REPLY TO EGYPT'S PROPAGANDA OFFENSIVE AND ALSO PROVES ISRAEL ADHERENCE TO THE PRINCIPLE OF FREE PASSAGE FOR ALL NATIONS.

6. AL-HAMISHMAR EDITORIAL WELCOMES THE DECISION. " ISRAEL HAS DONE WELL TO TAKE THIS STEP. IT
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DOUBTLESS INVOLVES RISKS, BUT FOR THE SAKE OF PEACE WE MUST ALSO TAKE RISKS..."

7. HATZOFE NOTES THAT SADAT, WHILE CALLING THE ISRAELI GESTURE " ENCOURAGING" HAS NOT EVEN HINTED ANYTHING ABOUT PASSAGE FOR ISRAELI CARGOES, AND CONTINUES, " THE GOVERNMENT'S DECISION HAS BEEN TAKEN FOR POLITICAL/ INFORMATIONAL CONSIDERA-

TIONS...EVEN THOUGH THE EGYPTIANS SHOW NO DESIRE TO IMPLEMENT THE CLAUSE ABOUT ALLOWING ISRAELI CARGOES TO PASS THE CANAL..."

8. YEDIOT WRITES THE WHILE RABIN'S GESTURE TOWARDS EGYPT AND THE AMERICANS MAY NOT HAVE BEEN JUSTIFIED, IT WAS WORTH TAKING. IT WARNS AGAINST BUILDING EXAGGERATED HOPES.

9. MAARIV ALSO THINKS THAT ONE MUST NOT OVER-ESTIMATE THE IMPORTANCE OF THE GESTURE--AND NOT TO OVERDO THE CRITICISM. "THIS IS NO WITHDRAWAL, NO SHIFTING OF POSITIONS, NO EVACUATION OF AREAS. IT IS A STEP OF SO MINOR MILITARY IMPORTANCE THAT IT IS ALL IN ALL A HINT OF GOOD INTENTIONS AND NO MORE...IT DOES NOT MEAN THAT FROM NOW ON ISRAEL WILL NO LONGER BE ABLE TO ATTACK SHIPS IN THE CANAL. IT MEANS THAT WE SHOW THAT WE HAVE NO SUCH INTENTIONS..." MAARIV ADDS THAT THE FACT THAT ISRAELI GESTURE IS ENTIRELY UNILATERAL SHOWS THAT IT IS DESIGNED NOT SO MUCH TO APPEASE EGYPT AS TO PLEASE WASHINGTON. IT IS PERHAPS THE FIRST STEP TOWARDS CLEARING THE AIR IN ISRAELI-US RELATIONS.

10. AL MILITARY EXPERTS ARE UNANIMOUS IN STRESSING THAT DECISION CONTAINS NO MILITARY RISKS AND THINNING OUT WON'T CHANGE BALANCE OF FORCES IN THE SINAI. HAARETZ (SHIFF) WRITES THAT "EGYPT'S CAPABILITY TO SURPRISE ISRAEL BY SUDDENLY MOVING FORCES INTO THE SINAI WILL NOT CHANGE. THIS CAPABILITY IS GREAT IN ANY CASE..." SHIFF ADDS THAT "PERHAPS THE ONLY MILITARY SIGNIFICANCE IN UNCLASSIFIED

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THE ISRAELI GESTURE IS THAT THE SUEZ CANAL WILL BE OUT OF RANGE OF ISRAELI LAND TROOPS' FIRE AFTER THE THINNING OUT..." A SIMILAR VIEW IS ADOPTED BY OTHER EXPERTS.

11. WASHINGTON BASED ISRAELI REPORTERS WRITE THAT RABIN'S ANNOUNCEMENT OVERSHADOWED REPORTS ON AN AGREEMENT BETWEEN FORD-SADAT(AS IT DID IN ISRAEL).MAARIV(SEGEV) WRITES THAT RABIN'S ANNOUNCEMENT HELPED, "AT LEAST TEMPORARILY TO CLEAR THE AIR A LITTLE OF THE GLOOMY ATMOSPHERE CREATED BY REPORTS FROM SALZBURG... ON AN AGREEMENT BETWEEN SADAT AND FORD TO EXERT PRESSURE ON ISRAEL TO MAKE UNILATERAL CONCESSIONS, INCLUDING A PARTIAL WITHDRAWAL ON THE GOLAN.." DAVAR

(BARNEA) REPORTS THAT " ISRAEL GESTURE WAS RECEIVED MOST FAVORABLY IN THE US AND ADMINISTRATION OFFICIALS SAID THAT IT SHOWS GOOD-WILL IMPROVES THE ATMOSPHERE AND DEMONSTRATES THAT THE GOVERNMENT HAS THE ABILITY TO DECIDE. IT WAS ALSO EMPHASIZED THAT THE GESTURE CONTAINS NO MILITARY RISK FOR ISREL AND WILL MAKE ANY EGYPTIAN ATTEMPT TO MOVE TROOPS TO THE SINAI MORE DIFFICULT..."

12. HAARETZ(MARGALIT) QUOTES" IMPORTANT ELEMENTS IN THE PENTAGON" AS SAYING THAT " THE ISRELI GESTURE IN THE SINAI WILL MAKE NEGOTIATIONS FOR PURCHASE OF MODERN ARMS FROM US EASIER FOR HER..."

13. MAARIV POLITICAL REPORTER (HARIF) ANALYSES RABIN'S MOTIVES BEHIND THE DECISION AND WRITES THAT " RABIN'S CONSIDERATION WAS THAT TOWARDS THE END OF THE FORD-SADAT MEETING IN SALZBURG IT WOULD BE USEFUL TO FOCUS THE ATTENTION ON THE ISRAELI GESTURE AND NOT TO LEAVE WORLD MEDIA UNDER THE IMPRESSION OF 'PEACE-SEEKING EGYPT' VERSUS'A TOUGH' ISRAEL..." HARIF ADDS THAT PM RABIN " EXPRESSED LAST NIGHT HIS SATISFACTION AT THE POSITIVE AND IMMEDIATE REACTIONS REACHING JERUSALEM...IN RABIN'S EVALUATION, THE DECISION WAS JUSTIFIED AND WILL ENABLE HIM O NEGOTIATE UNCLASSIFIED

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NEXT WEEK WITH PRESIDENT FORD...IN AN ATMOSPHERE MORE COMFORTABLE FOR ISRAEL..."

14. JERUSALEM POST(LANDAU) WRITES THAT " FIRST REACTION AMONG POLITICAL OBSERVERS IN THE CAPITAL WAS FAVORABLE--EVEN ENTHUSIASTIC--TO THE GESTURE ITSELF, BUT CRITICAL OF THE TIMING OF THE ANNOUNCEMENT. THE EFFECT WOULD HAVE BEEN CONSIDERABLY GREATER , EXPERIENCED OBSERVES NOTED , HAD THE ANNOUNCEMENT BEEN MADE BEFORE THE FORD-SADAT MEETING..." SEVERAL NEWSPAPERS REPORT THAT DEFMIN PERES PRE-FERRED THE DECISION TO BE ANNOUNCED EARLIER. VELIOTES

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